

Saturday 10 March

250,000 workers were on strike. There was no public transport and no newspapers. Food shortages continued. Louis de Robien, a French diplomat living in Petrograd, wrote in his diary:

- C. 'The movement has taken on a political character . . . In the square in front of the Kazan Cathedral there are reserves of infantry . . . The troops opened fire in the Nevsky Prospekt [*Petrograd's main street*] at about six o'clock . . . Most of the rounds were blank . . . All the same there were some killed and wounded.'

Later in the day, Cossacks refused to attack a procession of strikers when they were ordered to do so.

Sunday 11 March

The President of the Duma, Michael Rodzianko, sent this telegram to the Tsar:

- D. 'The situation is serious. The capital is in a state of anarchy. The government is paralysed; the transport system is broken down; the food and fuel supplies are completely disorganised. Discontent is general and on the increase. There is wild shooting on the streets; troops are firing at each other. It is urgent that someone enjoying the confidence of the country be entrusted with the formation of a new government.'

The Tsar's response to this telegram was to order the Duma to stop meeting.

Monday 12 March

At six o'clock in the morning a mutiny began in the Volinsky regiment of the army: a sergeant shot his commanding officer dead. The soldiers then left their barracks and marched into the centre of Petrograd. Louis de Robien recorded the results in his diary:

- E. 'Serious mutiny has broken out among the troops and all the men we saw belong to regiments sent to restore order, who, after firing a few volleys, made common cause with the mutineers. All the units sent to fight the mutiny are defecting [*changing sides*] one after another.'

Later in the day the Duma held a meeting, despite the Tsar's order not to do so. It set up a twelve-man committee called the **Provisional Committee** to take over the government.

That evening, revolutionaries set up a Soviet, or council, of workers and soldiers in Petrograd. The Petrograd Soviet also intended to take over the government and immediately began to organise food supplies for the city.

Tuesday 13 March

Tsar Nicholas sent a telegram to the Duma, saying that he would share power with the Duma. Michael Rodzianko, the Duma leader, replied:

- F. 'The measures you propose are too late. The time for them has gone. There is no return.'

Wednesday 14 March

Leading army generals sent telegrams to Nicholas, informing him that none of the army supported him. Nicholas, 500 km away in army headquarters, now tried to return to Petrograd to take control of the situation. But, according to Louis de Robien:

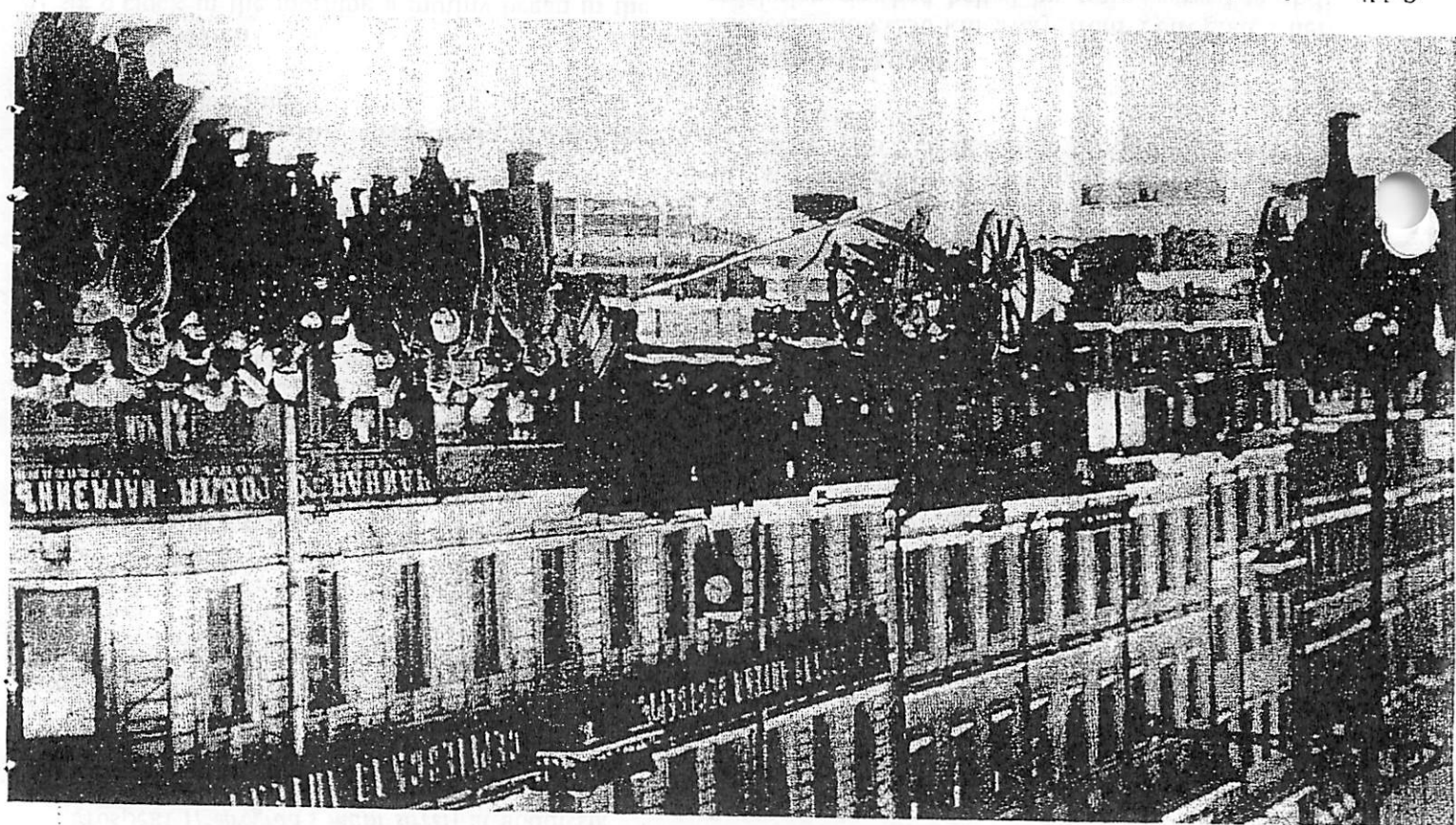
- G. 'My first impression on leaving the house this morning was a better one. There seem to be fewer shots and there is some attempt at organisation: in fact, I met a convoy of sledges carrying food supplies, escorted by soldiers . . . It is said that the Emperor has left Headquarters, but that his train has been stopped by the revolutionaries while he was on his way to Tsarskoe Selo [*a royal palace near Petrograd*].'

Thursday 15 March

Nicholas, now 250 km away from Petrograd where revolutionaries had halted his train, agreed to abdicate and give the throne to Alexis. Later he realised that Alexis was too ill to be Tsar and gave the crown to his brother, Grand Duke Michael, instead.

Grand Duke Michael, however, feared that he would be just as unpopular as Nicholas, and within twenty-four hours he too had abdicated. Russia was now a republic – a country governed not by a monarch but by an elected leader. The question was, which elected body should govern Russia – the Duma's Provisional Committee or the Petrograd Soviet?

THE REVOLUTION OF MARCH 1917



Soldiers and workers together behind a barricade in a Petrograd street, March 1917

During the month of March 1917 conditions in Russia grew rapidly worse. In the capital, Petrograd, discontent turned into a full-scale revolution which overthrew the Tsar. This is how it happened:

Wednesday 7 March

The managers of the giant Putilov steel works locked out their 20,000 workers after pay talks broke down. This meant that 20,000 tough, angry steel workers were now out on the streets in a mood for trouble. Workers in other factories went on strike in support of the steel workers.

Thursday 8 March

Fifty factories closed down and 90,000 workers went out on strike. As this was International Women's Day there were also thousands of socialist women on the streets, demonstrating. The subject on everybody's mind was bread, as Sybil Grey, an Englishwoman living in Petrograd, recorded in her diary:

A. 'On Thursday March 8th a poor woman entered a bread shop on the Morskaya la

B.

'About one half of the industrial workers of Petrograd are on strike. . . . The workers come to the factories in the mornings; instead of going to work, they hold meetings; then begin the processions towards the centre. . . . Throughout the entire day, crowds of people poured from one part of the city to the other. They were persistently dispelled by the police, stopped and crowded back by cavalry

Friday 9 March

200,000 workers were on strike. According to Leon Trotsky, writing in his *History of the Russian Revolution* in 1932, asking for bread. bread. She was told there was none. On leaving the shop, seeing bread in the window, she broke the window and took it. A general, passing in his motor, stopped and remonstrated with her [told her off]. A crowd collected round them, smashed his motor car, and increasing in size, paraded the streets asking for bread.'